

kyrie eleison by MissAtomicBomb (mrs_nerimon)

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Summary:

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He took out an other worldly monster with a baseball bat. How's that gonna look on a resume, Dad?

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Author's Note:

Validate my Stevie feelings, y'all.

He knows there are things that went down that week that he'll never understand. He's not as stupid as some people seem to think he is. Spending 30 minutes in the morning styling your hair doesn't equal being an idiot.

Like, okay, maybe he doesn't have a 3.99 and maybe he skips Physics to smoke under the bleachers and maybe he failed last weeks Calc test.

But that's school, that's not real shit.

He's pretty good at real shit.

He took out an other worldly monster with a baseball bat. *How's that gonna look on a resume, Dad?*

It's not, of course. And his dad doesn't know a thing about it all, except that he lost a fight to Jonathan Byers of all people.

"That whole family." His dad says at dinner, and his mom *mhms* in agreement. "Hardly a surprise what happened to that little boy."

It is pretty shitty hearing it come out of someone else's mouth.

He sleeps with a bat next to his bed.

His mom thinks it's good luck, for scholarships or whatever. That's fine. Better that than admit it's for when he wakes up and the room is twisting, something crashing through the ceiling, letting out a horrifying screech that exists only in his nightmares.

Sometimes it's so vivid he has to take up the bat and go outside, swinging until his shoulders ache.

If his parents notice, they don't say a thing.

He doesn't tell Nancy, because she has a list of shit to deal with that reaches over her head, through the roof, stretching towards dimensions unknown.

Her brother is towards the top, and then Barbara, and a little ways down comes Byers, and then Steve figures he's somewhere after that.

Which is fine, really. And not “*fine*” in the way that he says it's fine at school, when Nancy eats lunch in the darkroom and Reed sneers that she's making him look like an *actual retard*.

It's fine. He wouldn't want to bother her anyway.

Nancy has real problems. Nancy has a brother who's grieving, a mother to explain a hundred and one things to. She has Barbara's parents to confront.

He didn't even do the hard part. He came in at the eleventh hour and saved their asses, sure, but they'd already done all the heavy lifting. He sees the proof in the looks they share, the scars on their hands.

Diagonal, straight across the palm. Left to right.

Steve wonders what it must feel to be marked like that.

Monster hunting. That's what Nancy says when she talks about it.

Nancy and Jonathan: Monster hunters.

Steve: Boyfriend.

There are dreams where he never goes back in the house. He just gets in the car and drives, drives, drives. He can see the lights flickering,

blinking passage in the windows, but he just puts the key in the ignition and peels out of the driveway.

He can still hear her screaming.

The jealousy comes sudden, still. Like a flash in his gut. He tries to stamp it out, impale it on the end of a makeshift club.

The Wheeler's address book is open on Nancy's desk, straight to B.

Byers, Joyce.

Steve lets his fingers rest on the edge of the page, debates closing it, slamming the book.

But they won't erase the impulse, the desire. She wants to talk to him. She'll talk to him.

So he hunches up his shoulders and heads down to the kitchen, watches Nancy dart around her brother as she collects snacks.

He asks Mike how their game is going in the basement.

The boy cranes his head over his shoulder, eyes him with a wary glance.

"Are you winning, or-"

Do those games even have a winner?

"Yup." Mike turns around, clutching four plastic cups of soda in his two hands. "We're winning."

Steve smiles, the kind that usually gives him an extension on a paper he forgot to write, but Mike moves past him and back into the basement.

The three of them eat lunch together on the Monday Byers comes back to school, and it's the most awkward thing that, Steve imagines, any one of them has experienced in their lives.

Well, knowing Byers, maybe not.

Nancy tries to play the peacemaker, like an overexcited mother with her toddler at a play date.

"Jonathan loves music. Jonathan works at the movie theatre. Jonathan wants to visit New York over the summer, right?"

The other boy nods. His hair's half covering his face so they can't see his eyes, and for the first time it occurs to Steve that it might be on purpose, and not just a very, very unfortunate bowl cut.

"That's cool, man. They'd really dig the whole damaged artist shtick there."

"Shtick?"

Nancy clears her throat and Byers looks down at his food, drops the tension from his face.

Oh, he definitely got the same talk from Nancy that Steve did. Which was *Be nice, he's going through a lot*.

Actually, Byers' talk was probably along the lines of *Be nice, he's my asshole boyfriend*.

"How's the house coming along?"

Steve had asked his dad if they could go over and help fix up the Byers house with the rest of the neighborhood, but he hadn't even looked up from the paper as he said *what was the point, it's only going to become a shithole again soon*.

Steve had still gone over himself, helped put up wallpaper next to Chief Hopper. What a weird, *weird* world he lives in now.

"Fine." Jonathan aggressively spears a peach. "We patched up the hole."

"That's good."

Ah, yes, it's good that there is no longer a giant-ass, gaping hole in the side of your family home. Thank God for small mercies. Now, how is that brother from another dimension?

Nancy asks about his mom, who's back to work later this week. They talk about that for a while *-she'd stay home with him, but we have to buy a new carpet for the hallway soon-* and then Nancy slowly brings up Will.

"He's okay. He doesn't really talk about it."

"Maybe he should see somebody. Like a specialist."

Two pairs of eyes set on him, and Steve wants to take it back, only his big mouth keeps going.

"Just- It could really help. Somebody who could understand."

"Who else could understand?" Jonathan snaps.

"Maybe there's stuff he doesn't want to tell you guys." *Oh, man, shut up. Shut up.*

"He can tell me anything."

Nancy softly interjects with a question about an English assignment from last week.

By the time lunch is over, Byers is a set of shoulders holding a fork and Nancy keeps clenching her fist and Steve feels mostly responsible.

They don't have lunch together again.

Most days Nancy eats in the library. Students really aren't supposed to, but she's quiet about it, and once word gets around that Barbara is almost definitely dead, the teachers kind of start letting Nancy do whatever she wants. Like Byers.

Byers hands in a book report two weeks late and says he's sorry; Mr. Tompkins says he hopes that little brother is doing alright.

Steve almost feels envious, only then he remembers doesn't have a brother to miss, and his childhood best friends aren't dead.

Sometimes Nancy eats with him, on the hood of his car, or under a tree in the quad. Sometimes she eats in the darkroom.

Really, shut your damn mouth, he tells Reed. *You don't know what you're talking about.*

(Even though one time he comes by to visit and they have their heads close together, whispering over something they won't show when he asks.

He walks out and finds, to limited surprise, there's no jealousy poking him in the stomach.)

It's kind of like they're '*staying together for the kids*', only they're 17 years old. And don't have any kids. And the only thing they really share anymore is some weird, twisted desire to hang onto the past.

He sees Will Byers at Nancy's one day, scampering up the steps after his friends. He pauses on the landing and coughs loudly into his arm, and when he looks up they lock eyes.

It's terrible.

Steve feels the urge to apologize, but that's not what a boy who just came back from the dead wants to hear.

Sorry I talked shit about your family to get your big brother to fight me. He kicked my ass, by the way.

Tommy's stupid comment comes into his head, *bet he's the one that killed him*, and Steve has to shove his hands in his pockets and walk away in cowardice from a goddamn 12-year-old.

Sometimes he tells himself it's only Tommy and Carol who used to say that shit. He was never like that.

But he had never stopped them from saying it either, and there are only so many lines he can draw between himself and his asshole friends.

He tries walking when the sleeplessness gets too bad.

He makes loops around the block, hands in his jacket, head down. He misses the turn at the end of his street, keeps going past the trees on the road. Makes it all the way to the Byers' and stands, like a creep, at the edge of their lawn.

There's a light on somewhere inside. He almost wants to knock on the door, ask if he can take a peek at their living room.

Just checking all the monsters are gone, you know?

The sun comes up over the houses. He keeps walking.

The package from IU comes in March.

Without much deliberation, he commits the next day. The letter drops into the mailbox with a soft thud, and Steve wishes he felt something bigger.

Nancy's looking at Yale, Columbia, Brown.

"We'll both be home at holidays." She says, and neither of them even attempt to calculate the distance.

Steve thinks it's almost like they don't care, but not quite. Because he wants Nancy to be happy. Wants her to go to college and get the fuck out of dodge, out of Hawkins, forever.

She's got a whole other year of high school left, though, and he'll be in Bloomington in five months, and what then?

"It's not going to work out."

She flattens her hands against her skirt, stares straight ahead at his car window.

"I mean- It's not just me, right?"

Nancy looks blank. Quiet, contemplative. Like someone else, for a second.

"No."

"And I still- I care about you, Nance."

It's not you, it's me. Well, actually, it's both of us. But mostly it's the monster we fought off last fall. And it's Byers, like, come on, am I wrong?

“Right.” She scoots over on the seat, another inch between them. “Me too.”

He doesn't know if he should offer to drive her back to her place now, or if they could just sit here in silence in a gas station parking lot for the rest of eternity.

He leaves for school mid-August. He's got it all packed up a week before, a rare display of preparedness.

The bat rests on top of his suitcase. As he's loading it all into the car, his father pulls it off, makes a face at it.

“Maybe you can play club.” He says, like it's a compliment.

“Yeah.” Steve takes the handle, slings it across his shoulders. “Maybe.”